



**Request for City Council Committee Action  
From the Department of Health & Family Support**

**Date:** November 28, 2012

**To:** PUBLIC SAFETY, CIVIL RIGHTS & HEALTH COMMITTEE

**Subject:** REPORT FROM ADVISORY COMMITTEES WITH  
RECOMMENDATIONS ON RECREATIONAL FIRES

**Recommendation:**

Receive and file report from Citizens Environmental Advisory Committee and the Public Health Advisory Committee on recreational fires.

**Previous Directives:** October 12, 2011 directive to staff from the Public Safety, Civil Rights and Health Committee for the two advisory committees to review the recreational fire ordinance and consider possible improvements both from a health and safety perspective.

**Prepared or Submitted by:** Becky McIntosh, Director of Planning & Administration  
Phone: x2884

**Approved by:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Gretchen Musicant, Commissioner of Health

**Permanent Review Committee (PRC):** Approval \_\_\_\_ Not Applicable X  
**Policy Review Group (PRG)** Approval \_\_\_\_ Date of Approval \_\_\_\_ Not Applicable X

**Presenters in Committee:** Gretchen Camp, Citizens Environmental Advisory Committee  
Dan Brady, Public Health Advisory Committee

**Financial Impact (Check those that apply)**

X No financial impact (If checked, go directly to Background/Supporting Information).

**Background/Supporting Information Attached**

Following a presentation at the October 12, 2011, Public Safety Civil Rights and Health Committee relating to recreational fires and their impact on air quality, the following motion by Council Member Gordon was approved:

Committee Action Taken: Received & Filed Report. Formally requested the Public Health Advisory Committee and the Citizens Environmental Advisory Committee to review the recreational fire ordinance and consider possible improvements both from a health and a safety perspective.

In response to directive, report on the air quality and health impacts of smoke from recreational fires and on requirements and enforcement of City ordinances.

Report attached.

**REPORT FROM THE CITY OF MINNEAPOLIS  
CITIZENS ENVIRONMENTAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE (CEAC)  
AND THE  
PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY COMMITTEE (PHAC)  
ON THE HEALTH IMPACT OF SMOKE FROM RECREATIONAL FIRES**

**Background**

At the October 12, 2011, Public Safety Civil Rights and Health Committee of the City Council there was a presentation by Dan Huff from Environmental Management; Housing Inspections Director Tom Deegan; and Asst. Fire Chief Dave DeWall, relating to recreational fires and their impact on air quality, as well as information about enforcing the existing ordinance. The recreational fire ordinance is part of the fire code and enforced by the Fire Department and Fire Inspection Services.

Over the last year, the Minneapolis Citizens Environmental Advisory Committee (CEAC) and the Public Health Advisory Committee (PHAC) heard testimony from several individuals advocating tighter restrictions on and explaining the science behind wood smoke-particulate matter-as a component of regional air pollution.

CEAC received presentations from staff representing Regulatory Services and the Fire Department. The advocacy group, Take Back the Air, also presented their thoughts on the matter. Members of PHAC participated in these CEAC meetings and heard information presented from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency.

In 2011, 330 calls related to recreational fires were received by the Minneapolis Fire Department. Of these, 20 were in non-compliance of the existing fire code. In 2011, a total of 36,000 calls were received by the Fire Department; recreational fires calls represent less than 1% of all calls. The majority of the recreational fire complaints occur in the summer when windows are open and more people are out of doors. In 2011, Regulatory Services received 11 calls about recreational fires primarily about smoke and burning items other than wood.

As members of PHAC discussed the issue, they determined there has been no demonstration of why the current ordinance, when enforced, fails to protect the public's health. However, our recommendations, like those of CEAC, identify some enhancements that could further protect the public.

**CEAC Recommendations**

**1. Stronger education/outreach campaign regarding the recreational fire ordinance, such as:**

- Enhanced presence under Fire Department website
- Short Public Service announcement video
- Social media
- Other messaging such as utility bill inserts, enhanced outreach with press releases, City Council newsletters, Neighborhood Environmental Newsletter, etc.
  - Reach out in multiple languages / venues so as to reach the City's diverse population.
  - Messaging should include clear, concise language related to environmental and health impact on vulnerable populations.

**2. City Code revisions**

- The Minneapolis Code of Ordinances Chapter 178.20 should be updated in order that recreational fires are banned during Air Quality Alert Days, PM 2.5 for the metropolitan area as determined by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency.
- When extinguished, the fire must not be allowed to smolder.

**3. Enhanced Training**

- Conduct training of key City staff including 911, 311, and Fire Department on the ordinance.
- Recommend that Fire Department staff review Chapter 178.20 and develop policy language

(not ordinance changes) to define “nuisance” fires and “excessive” smoke.

**Conclusions:**

- CEAC did not address the issue of fires in City parks since this is primarily under the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board’s jurisdiction.
- According to Regulatory Services staff, fires related to cooking such as restaurant wood pizza stoves are exempt by state fire code so this was not addressed.
- The region is currently in attainment under the federal Clean Air Act for PM 2.5. If we were to fall into non-attainment, ordinances that regulate Recreational Fires may need to be reexamined on a broader regional issue.
- We considered permits/registration similar to the City of Edina, but based on the amount of effort, cost to implement it, and effectiveness, it was not deemed a wise choice.
- We also discussed an all-out ban on recreational fires. Because of the limited amount of calls, probable difficulty in enforcement, and the opportunities to try other options, it is not recommended at this time.

**PHAC Conclusions & Recommendations**

Committee members expressed a variety of concerns over the issue and recognize the potential health impacts of wood smoke-particulate matter. To date, there has been no demonstration of why the current ordinance, when enforced, fails to protect the public’s health.

This Committee supports the CEAC position and recommends:

- Placing greater emphasis on enforcement
- Increasing awareness of potential risk and nuisance through an educational campaign
- Including a provision in the ordinance to restrict burning on Air Quality Alert days

**Current Status on Recommendations Listed Above**

Update from Fire Marshall: January 1 - November 1, 2012, 459 complaint calls related to recreational fires were received; 342 were for unauthorized burning, which accounts for .25% of the entire number of our emergency calls. The majority of these complaint calls were due to a change in the language that any recreational fire must be 25’ from any structure or combustible material and in a fire ring or pit with edges more than 6” high. Fire Department response to these calls is primarily instructional, reviewing the ordinance language. Logs for every call and response indicate if repeat calls to same residence occur. If a change to ordinance wording included a ban on recreational fires during air quality alert days, training for 311 / 911 operators would be easy to institute—the added criteria become part of the checklist operators and responders go through in determining follow through.

Update from Communications: Many of the CEAC recommendations under point 1 already occur via the Communications Department’s usual channels. The Department uses the following tactics to promote messages about recreational fires: distributes a news release every spring and fall; submits a Newsbites article to elected officials for inclusion in their newsletters to constituents; posts news items on the City website and to social media; and, on air quality alert and advisory days, both posts messages on the City website and sends message to City employees encouraging residents and employees to postpone indoor and outdoor recreational fires. The Communications Department includes messages in National Night Out materials for planning a greener NNO party. Bulletin board slides run on City cable channels 14 and 79 between programming. A utility bill insert ran in June 2010.